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ABSTRACT

This study examines publicity actions designed to draw people into academic libraries for the specific purpose of visiting U.S. government documents collections. Data were obtained through interviews with the documents librarians at 12 academic libraries selected as having active documents programs on the basis of their responses to a brief survey. The interviews focused on the following aspects of publicity: (1) the preparation and use of guides, bookmarks, flyers, bibliographies, accessions lists, and newsletters; (2) the role of the documents department in providing instruction, orientation, and workshops on documents; and (3) methods of making individuals and librarians in the community aware of the documents collection. Various techniques used to publicize government documents collections are detailed, and recommendations for further study are presented. The survey instrument is appended. (KM)

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An Investigation and Description of Certain Actions Taken to Publicize the Documents Collection of Selected Academic United States Government Documents Depository Libraries in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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by
Jack W. Lyle

Cunningham Memorial Library
Indiana State University
January 1987

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Introduction

In the author's study of adoption of library public services at Indiana State University[1] it was found that students continued to use these services after they came to the library to learn about these services. This finding suggested that to get more people to use Indiana State University's United States government depository documents collection and its services it might be advantageous to study ways to get people to come to a documents department.

A review of library literature indicated a variety of actions that might be taken to make people aware of a documents collection. Because it had already been learned in the study mentioned above that students could be persuaded to adopt a service once they had been drawn into the library, it was decided to concentrate this new study on those documents publicity devices which would draw people into the library building for the specific purpose of visiting the documents collection. Therefore, exclusion was made of those devices that might draw people to the documents collection from another area of the library once they were already in the building. After those devices, such as displays, exhibits, and bulletin boards had been excluded, there remained a list of eighteen actions that might be taken.

[1]Lyle, Jack W. Indiana State University Undergraduate Students' Channels of and Use of Cunningham Memorial Library's Public Services. (ERIC documents 196442).

To locate the most active programs involving these eighteen actions preparation was made of a short "Documents Publicity Survey" (see Appendix). To obtain as large a response as possible, the "Survey" was kept to a simple one-page format that would not be time-consuming to fill out. Because of this brevity the "Survey" responses did not lend themselves to meaningful statistical analysis.

In the spring of 1985 the "Documents Publicity Survey" was mailed to fifty United States depository documents librarians in academic libraries at midwestern universities of which the enrollment was of a somewhat similar size to that of Indiana State University. (The enrollment size ranged from seven thousand to fifty thousand and the only midwestern states included were Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio.) Forty-eight of the fifty documents librarians responded to the "Survey".

Based on the responses of those documents librarians, twenty-five per cent of the responding libraries were selected for further scrutiny. Selected were the libraries that appeared to have a very active documents program involving the eighteen actions. (Other libraries not selected may have been equally active.) Those libraries selected were Ball State University, Bowling Green State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Illinois State University, Indiana University, Northern Kentucky University, Oakland University, Purdue University, University of

Cincinnati, University of Dayton, University of Illinois at Chicago, and University of Kentucky.

To obtain more specific details about the ways in which these twelve academic depositories "publicized" their United States government documents collection and services, visits were arranged to the documents librarians at these campuses. Along with the letter confirming the date for the visit to the documents department each documents librarian was mailed an individual list of interview questions based on the actions reported to be performed frequently in that particular department. The visits and interviews were completed during the summer of 1986.

Findings

During the visits samples were collected of guides, bookmarks, flyers, bibliographies, accessions lists, and a newsletter; and their preparation was discussed with the documents librarian. Also discussed were special efforts made to find out which documents were of interest to faculty members, particularly a Selective Dissemination of Information System. Examined too with these librarians was their documents department's role in giving instruction, orientation, and workshops on documents. In addition, methods of making individuals and librarians in the community aware of the documents collection were analyzed with these librarians. All of the above actions were reviewed as ways of getting people to come into the library to visit the

documents department with the thought that when they visited they could be informed about the U.S. documents collection and services and thus might well be persuaded to return repeatedly. It was recognized that encouraging people to come to the documents department initially would require mailing them the guides, bookmarks, flyers, bibliographies, accessions lists, and newsletter.

Almost all the libraries visited had a one-page general guide describing the scope of the documents department and its services. Some included a paragraph or two in a more general guide to all library services. Some also had a detailed guide for use with the documents collection. At least one had mixed these two into a guide which gave both a general and a detailed description of the collection.

The libraries visited did not prepare their own bookmarks or flyers. One documents librarian used the bookmark and the flyer Your Source for Government Information published by the Government Printing Office as part of a "kit" to send to new faculty members. Another documents librarian had the GPO bookmarks and flyers stamped with the address of the documents department and put out for people to pick up.

There was great diversity in the bibliographies prepared. One documents librarian primarily made sure that documents were included when reference librarians prepared a subject bibliography, although this librarian might also occasionally prepare a brief bibliography after seeing a

class assignment that seemed to call for one. Another documents librarian prepared bibliographies on faculty request. Of the bibliographies prepared at the different universities visited some were annotated and some were not; some referred to general documents and documents tools; and some were on a specific subject. One documents librarian used the Subject Bibliographies published by the GPO. Sometimes subject bibliographies were prepared by the documents librarians in cooperation with others in the library. One problem pointed out about all bibliographies was that it had become prohibitively expensive to reproduce long ones, especially if they were to be mailed. Although no solution to this problem, at another library visited the documents information desk had a list of their general and subject bibliographies (particularly those on topics often used by Freshmen). The patron could consult the list, ask to see a specific bibliography, and make a photocopy of it.

No documents department issued a separate documents accessions list, although in two libraries which regularly published a list of new accessions, documents were included in such a list. On a third campus, where there was an electronic mail system, the library put a list of new additions on this system and the documents department listed new documents reference tools or new documents sets.

One documents librarian prepared a two-page monthly newsletter with paragraphs on different topics, each

paragraph featuring one or more documents. At another university the library issued a newsletter and an item about documents might be included in it from time to time.

Generally the libraries visited had informal systems of finding out which documents were of interest to faculty members and notifying them of new documents that they might want to come in to use or to charge out. However, one documents department had a full-scale Selective Dissemination of Information System. All faculty members were sent a list of subjects and were asked to circle five subjects of particular interest. The subjects were numbered and these subject numbers were used to mark the individual documents on each depository shipping list. A subject catalog card was typed for each individual document. A card file by subject showed the number of faculty members interested in each subject so that how many copies of each subject catalog card to be photocopied was known. Another card file by faculty members' names showed the subject numbers in which they were interested. Through the use of this file the photocopied subject catalog cards were sorted into campus envelopes each one bearing a faculty member's name. (Many faculty members reported that they liked the 3x5 card format because it allowed them to keep their own card file.) Because this manual SDIS consumed too much staff time, it was hoped that time-saving might result from the computerization of the system.

Next to SDIS the most formal system of finding out which

documents faculty members were interested in was one in which the documents librarians gave new faculty members a list of subjects on which they could circle their interest. Because the back of the list was already addressed to the documents librarian the faculty member had only to staple the list and return it in campus mail. At one campus visited the documents librarian might access the library's computer to obtain a list of subjects in which various faculty members were interested. At another campus the documents librarian might consult the university research department for such a list. At a third campus the documents librarians became aware of the interests of faculty members through the documents questions the faculty members asked on the electronic mail system. To learn of faculty members' interests one documents librarian attended meetings with faculty library representatives while at two libraries the documents librarians paid special attention to faculty members' class assignments on documents. Others learned of faculty interests through personal contacts especially with those faculty members who came to the department to use documents.

Several methods were employed to inform faculty members about documents that they might want to use or charge out. By far the most common method was the documents librarian's telephoning a faculty member. However, two libraries visited had a special notification slip to send to faculty members.

To inform faculty members of documents of interest at one library occasional documents seminars were given and at another library new faculty members might be given a tour of the documents area. One documents librarian not only made documents presentations at faculty brown bag lunches, but also sent a monthly newsletter to faculty members. Three of the documents departments gave bibliographic lectures based on class assignments and encouraged the faculty member who made the assignment to accompany the class to learn about documents of interest.

The library-wide instruction and orientation program in the libraries visited was normally handled either by a separate library instruction unit or by the reference department. (There did not seem to be any clear-cut distinction between "instruction" and "orientation".) At most of these libraries instruction was given to Freshmen English classes and documents were generally included as a small part of this instruction. In addition to the overall library instruction and orientation program, some documents departments offered orientation and instruction specifically concerning documents. One documents department each fall gave one afternoon tour and one evening tour of the documents area and anyone was welcome to attend. At another campus anyone was welcome to attend a general documents lecture given in the fall. Three other documents departments gave a general documents lecture to a class if a faculty member requested the lecture. One of these departments sent faculty

members flyers advising of the availability of lectures while another told of their availability in the library's newsletter. Documents departments with several documents librarians, rather than one, were far more likely to tailor lectures to individual courses. Six documents departments visited gave bibliographic or subject documents lectures based on class assignments or on special needs outlined by the requesting faculty member. Two libraries offered graduate students a bibliographic instruction lecture given by the library's appropriate subject bibliographer, who included documents as part of this lecture. (One documents department had graduate students fill out a sheet about their topic and assigned one of the documents librarians to consult them about documents useful for their topic.)

While workshops or seminars were conducted in some documents departments visited, these were not necessarily given by the documents librarian. One documents librarian arranged for the regional Census Office to give a workshop and another arranged for several government agencies jointly to present a statistics workshop. On the other hand, some documents librarians gave their own workshop or seminar. While one documents department had abandoned their practice of giving an annual general workshop for anyone who wanted to attend, each year they conducted three seminars for faculty members--a general introduction to documents, a seminar on statistical sources, and a seminar on specialized tools and

available data-bases. On another campus the documents librarian each fall conducted seminars on business statistics and statistical sources for faculty members and students.

In addition to conducting workshops for faculty members and students some documents departments presented workshops for off-campus groups or individuals. Because the library was an affiliate of the state data center one documents librarian did a workshop for community people in human services and development. Another documents department gave the librarians at a nearby college a workshop on tracing legislation. A third documents librarian gave workshops for public health groups and for the local genealogy society.

Besides workshops documents librarians visited had other methods of making individuals and librarians in the community aware of their documents collections. Personal contacts were maintained informally or at professional meetings. In one case documents librarians saw community librarians not only by going to various general meetings, but also by attending an area council documents subcommittee, which met several times a year. At two campuses visited the library was the reference center for the area's library network, which fact seemed to heighten the area librarians' awareness of the documents collection's existence. One documents librarian sent the monthly documents newsletter to community leaders and others interested in statistics. Sometimes a paragraph from this newsletter generated the interest of a reporter,

who wrote a newspaper article mentioning the documents department. Another documents librarian got a member of congress from the state to present a service certificate to the depository. This public official's appearance on campus generated publicity in the campus newspaper, in the local newspaper, and on the local radio stations, thus making the community aware of the documents department. Sometimes the individuals in the community became aware of the wide range of items available in the documents department when they came there for a specific purpose. One documents department housed the census schedules, which people came to consult. Two other documents departments had blank Internal Revenue Service forms available for people to pick up. (The IRS forms presented a problem if it was not made clear to people that the documents department staff was not qualified to advise them on the preparation of IRS forms.)

Although not a method of getting people to the library for the specific purpose of going to the documents department once people were in the library building referrals from librarians and staff members were useful in getting people to go to the documents department. The two most common methods used to inform the other librarians and staff so that they knew to make such referrals were update reports and workshops. One documents librarian in the update report to the Reference staff included changes in Superintendent of Documents classification numbers, reorganization of agencies

and departments, news from Administrative Notes and Documents to the People, and new documents useful in answering reference questions. In the one library visited where the documents librarian worked part time at the general reference desk all public service for documents was handled at this desk. So that the other general reference desk librarians knew about the documents collection when the documents librarian was not there, the documents librarian and the documents office assistants provided this desk with notebooks full of information including brief write-ups on useful new documents, lists and descriptions of categories of material (especially the latest decennial census), assorted communications in bulletin format, and very brief subject bibliographies. In regard to workshops for librarians and staff one documents librarian presented a general workshop to staff members, while at another campus the information was provided in an orientation tour for new Reference staff members. At a third campus the documents librarian gave librarians and staff an in-service workshop on access tools to government documents, such as the Publications Reference File and the Monthly Catalog, and accompanied the workshop with a fifteen-question exercise to help the participants apply what they had learned.

In summary then the campus visits to documents librarians provided a great deal of information on preparing or using guides, bookmarks, flyers, bibliographies, accessions lists, and newsletters; on finding out which

documents were of interest to faculty members; on offering instruction, orientation, and workshops about documents; and on making individuals and librarians in the community aware of the documents collection.

Recommendation for Further Study

As is evident from the above report of findings, the information gleaned allows for description but not for quantitative analysis. Thus, a future investigation might concentrate on developing the "Documents Publicity Survey" into an instrument which would lend itself to meaningful statistical analysis. First, the variables need to be identified and defined. In addition, the survey instrument should include clear definitions of the included terms, such as "flyer", "guide", and "orientation". Recent library literature has emphasized the fact that terms such as "often", "occasionally", and "rarely" are imprecise. To determine with as much exactitude as possible the frequency with which publicity actions are performed, these terms should also be given precise definitions. Moreover, space should be provided on the instrument for the respondents to further elaborate on and clarify their answers. Finally, the survey instrument should be sent only to a randomly selected sample of the population to be studied.

APPENDIX

DOCUMENTS PUBLICITY SURVEY

Please place the number 1, 2, or 3 in the blank in front of each item according to the frequency with which you do this for United States government documents.

1=often 2=occasionally 3=rarely or never

___ Prepare radio and television spot announcements

___ Prepare articles for the campus newspaper

___ Use the campus news service

___ Write a column for the local newspaper

___ Use your library instruction program

___ Offer orientation on the use of documents

___ Hold workshops on the use of documents

___ Prepare guides or handbooks

___ Prepare subject bibliographies

___ Prepare reading lists

___ Prepare accession lists

___ Publish a documents newsletter

___ Prepare flyers or bookmarks

___ Give talks to community groups

___ Give programs to "Friends of the Library"

___ Make special effort to find out what faculty members need in documents

___ Offer a Selective Dissemination of Information Service alerting faculty members to incoming materials relevant to their interests

___ Encourage librarians in the district served by the Depository Library to refer patrons to the Depository Library

Others not listed that you often do:

Please use the back of this sheet for any comments.